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SUBJECT: UNESCO DIRECTOR-GENERAL RACE ENTERS THE LAST LAP

REF: STATE 82701

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Egypt's Farouk Hosni leads the pack in the race to be UNESCO's next Director-General. He appears to have 20-25 votes of the 30 needed to obtain the endorsement of UNESCO's 58-member Executive Board. Notably, he has recently picked up support from India which, added to Brazil which backed him in May, gives him support from two highly influential regional powers. He is within striking distance of victory on what will be a secret ballot, but his victory is not inevitable. He does not have the support of UNESCO's major contributors, nor does he have support of many in Africa, despite the African Union's apparent endorsement. Many states believe he would be a disengaged manager who would rather ignore UNESCO's serious management deficiencies than deal with them, and many question his commitment to UNESCO's ideals given his history of anti-Semitic comments. Hosni can be beaten if he fails to win on the first ballot. Most of those committed to him have promised to vote for him only once, and many even in the Middle East are likely to desert his cause. The key will be finding a way for his opponents to coalesce around the candidate who has the best chance of winning. End Summary.

¶2. (U) UNESCO's 58-member Executive Board will conduct up to five secret ballots September 17-22 to decide which of nine candidates for UNESCO Director-General to recommend for selection by the October General Conference as UNESCO's new leader. Obtaining a precise breakdown of support for each candidate is impossible at this time. Many permanent representatives are taking advantage of the August lull to consult their capitals and obtain instructions. Some delegations are being deliberately close-mouthed, while we know for a fact that others have promised their support to more than one candidate. At least two permanent representatives have told us they will take advantage of the secrecy of the ballot to ignore instructions from their capital and vote for whom they please.

¶3. (SBU) By any yardstick, Egypt's Culture Minister Farouk Hosni is far ahead. Egypt has been engaged in high-level deal-making and arm-twisting with other governments for more than two years. Along the way it has picked up the endorsement of the Arab League and of the African Union (AU), although the former may be much more valuable than the latter. While Arab delegations tell us they will join the Arab League consensus on the first ballot, despite the personal misgivings many have, many AU delegations tell us the AU endorsement was due only to heavy pressure from Libya's Qadhafi at the last AU meeting in Sirte, and that they do not intend to respect the AU position. (Comment: In our experience, Africans usually try to paper over divisions between north and south, but on this subject Sub-Saharan resentment at perceived bullying by Egypt and Libya is being expressed with unusual openness.) More useful to Egypt have been endorsements by Brazil and India, each of which initially took a reserved position but have now come around to support and campaign for Hosni. Both Brazil and India exercise strong influence in their respective regions and have the potential to bring others into his column.

¶4. (SBU) Hosni's opponents are divided and struggling but in many cases passionate in opposing him. We continually hear concerns expressed about the way he ran his ministry in Cairo and the

conviction for corruption of members of his staff by an Egyptian court. Many tell us they fear he would be a distant, unapproachable, hands-off manager who would ignore UNESCO's many management failings and let things slide back to the way they were before the current director-general began attempting to reform the organization. Criticism of Hosni's past anti-Semitic remarks cuts both ways, winning him sympathy from some in the Islamic world but causing many in Europe but also in Africa and Latin America to doubt his commitment to UNESCO's core principles. Notably, virtually none of UNESCO's major contributors like him, and this could have a very negative impact on his ability to raise funds for the Organization, should he win. Japan, the UK, Canada, Mexico, France, the Nordics, and Russia, for example, are all outspoken Hosni critics.

15. (SBU) The fundamental problem of Hosni's opponents is that they do not have a clear figure around which to rally. Each of the other candidates has obvious flaws. Of them, Austria's Benita Ferrero-Waldner, probably has the most votes. She has wide support in northern Europe, backing from Colombia and perhaps Mexico, as well as the possibility of support in Africa. Her critics contend she is a late-comer to the campaign with little evident interest in UNESCO, and they complain she has been falsely trying to claim that she is the EU candidate and can deliver EU development aid to potential supporters in the developing world. In addition, many of Hosni's detractors feel that it is not Europe's turn to lead this organization. Europeans essentially ran it from its foundation until the mid-1970's and again in the 1990's under Spanish former director-general Federico Mayor.

16. (SBU) Other rivals have less support. Russian Vice-Foreign Minister Yakovenko has tried to position himself as the alternative to Hosni who could appeal to both developing and developed countries, but he has failed to win much support in either camp. The Russian ambassador was chagrined to admit to us that even states Russia considered natural allies like Serbia and Azerbaijan have committed to vote for Hosni rather than Yakovenko. (Comment: Serbia's position, which was intended to enlist Egyptian support in blocking the tendency of Arab states to recognize Kosovo, clearly

rankled Russia. End Comment.) Bulgaria's candidate, UNESCO PermRep Irina Bukova, has campaigned energetically for almost as long as the Egyptian, but Yakovenko is now directly competing for many of the same countries Bukova is targeting. She may pick up scattered votes in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa but the total is unlikely to be large. Her detractors feel she lacks vision and the strong personality that would be needed to impose order on a large international organization. Lithuania's candidate, Ina Marciulonyte, is generally conceded to have vision and the best understanding of any candidate of UNESCO's internal workings, but she is felt to lack charisma. Her vote total is thus probably in the low single digits, similar to Bukova's.

17. (SBU) The remaining candidates may have even less support. Ecuador's Ivone Baki, herself of Lebanese extraction, has attracted support among the Lebanese diaspora in the Caribbean and has gotten some quiet help from Lebanon itself, but her vote total also appears low. In Europe, where she is not well-known she is seen as a light weight with insufficient management experience to run the organization. The African candidates, Noreini Tidjani-Serpos (Benin) and Sospeter Muhongo (Tanzania) have little support beyond their home countries, and, in Tidjani-Serpos' case, he may not even have that. The Beninois ambassador, a bitter rival of Tidjani's, made clear to us recently that he is not enthusiastic about Tidjani's candidacy. Finally, there is the strange case of former Algerian Foreign Minister Mohammed Bedjaoui who was nominated by Cambodia. Algeria reportedly announced publicly it did not support him at the last AU Summit, while Cambodia maintains it is not campaigning for him. Cambodia has not, however, written a letter withdrawing his nomination, so he remains an official candidate. Given such tepid backing, we believe Bedjaoui is likely to receive no votes on the first ballot.

18. (SBU) Comment: We believe Hosni has to win on the first round, if he is going to do so. He is not far from what he needs, but the commitments he has are for the first round only. Several states committed to voting for him on the first round tell us that they will not vote for him on succeeding rounds. This includes several Arab states who seem to have their own quiet misgivings about him. If there are two or more ballots, it will be important to build momentum around one of Hosni's opponents. This will require some of

Hosni's opponents to drop out and direct their votes to the anti-Hosni candidate with the best chance. We anticipate intense consultations among Hosni's opponents as soon as the French vacation period ends.

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